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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 7469
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 002221

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran
3. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

The media continued to report on the release of 255 Palestinian prisoners this morning. The released prisoners signed a pledge not to return to terrorism and they will be welcomed back in Ramallah with a feast.

Jordanian FM Abdelelah Al-Khatib was quoted as saying on Thursday, in an interview with Ha'aretz, that there will be no peace in the region unless the Palestinian problem is solved.

The Jerusalem Post and other major media reported that on Thursday a high-ranking IDF officer called for a large-scale military operation to be mounted within a "limited window of opportunity" that might close in less than a year. He claimed that Hamas has jumped light years ahead militarily since Israel's disengagement from Gaza. The officer was quoted as saying that Hamas now had 13,000 armed men, had dramatically increased weapons smuggling, and was working to obtain Katyusha rocket capability. The officer was quoted as saying that the Egyptians, Americans, and Europeans could not be counted on to stop Hamas, as Israel would have to do the "final job." Ha'aretz noted: "However ominous the Hamas threat may be, it has nowhere near the capability of Hizbullah or Syria.

The Arabic-language Assennara revealed that envoys from Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the PA will hold talks today and on Saturday in London in an effort to restore the trust between the Saudi King and Mahmoud Abbas and assess the situation following Hamas's takeover of Gaza. In addition, the Israeli envoy will affirm Israel's willingness to withdraw from West Bank cities, remove most of the checkpoints, and transfer large areas to the Palestinian Authority forces.

Leading media quoted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as saying in Damascus on Thursday that this summer will be "hot" and will bring defeat for the "region's enemies."

Maariv quoted a member of the Winograd Commission as saying that the commission will present no personal recommendations regarding PM Ehud Olmert.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday Hamas leaders condemned Chairman Abbas's decision to hold parliamentary and presidential elections and that they decided to foil the vote. The Jerusalem Post cited claims by Hamas that Abbas and Israel are planning to kill its leaders. The General Secretary of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Nayef Hawatmeh, was quoted as saying in an interview with the Arabic-language Kull al-Arab that he will return home when the Olmert government stops playing around and allows his return without conditions. As leaders we have to be inside our land and stand with our people in order to fight for our rights, Hawatmeh added. He was further quoted as saying that there is no other way forward for Abbas and Hamas but to return to the path of unity and implement the National Reconciliation Document's clauses.

Leading media quoted the Quartet's Mideast envoy, former British PM Tony Blair, as saying on Thursday that he was optimistic momentum could be regained in talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Jerusalem Post quoted GOI officials as saying on Thursday that Israel has no intention at this time to transfer responsibility for Palestinian cities in the West Bank to the PA.

Maariv reported that "Israel and the PA are close to reaching a historic economic agreement": Israel will purchase natural gas from the British company BG, which will drill in Palestinian territory; the Israel Navy will protect the gas facilities; and Tony Blair can be the "godfather" of the deal.

Ha'aretz cited an AP wire report that on Thursday Israeli President Shimon Peres called on Syria to open direct peace talks with Israel.

Israel Radio quoted the London-based Al-Hayat as saying that Syria has asked Denmark to mediate between it and Israel. Most senior officials in the [Israeli] defense establishment believe that the United States will not strike Iran during George Bush's term -- everybody, that is, except Olmert."

Ha'aretz quoted sources in Jerusalem as saying that senior Egyptian officials visiting Washington have failed to convince Congress to

change course on its intention to freeze USD 200 million in aid. The freeze is partially due to Egypt's inaction against weapons smuggling across the Egypt-Gaza Strip border.

The media reported that several Qassam rockets landed in and around Sderot on Thursday and today. Maariv reported that last week Palestinians almost lynched an Israeli intelligence officer in the Nablus refugee camp of Balata.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Defense Ministry will launch its most advanced spy satellite in September aboard an Indian rocket. The Israel Aerospace Industries-made satellite is capable of transmitting tiny images in all weather conditions.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the Israeli-Arab advocacy center, Mossawa, on Thursday pointed to the large gap between the number of bomb shelters in the Arab and Jewish sectors. The Jewish areas have more.

Maariv reported that on Thursday the settler-sponsored Council for Higher Education in Judea and Samaria decided to turn Ariel College into a university. Maariv reported that the GOI refuses to fund the change, and that Peace Now complained that the proposed move will strengthen the occupation. Maariv noted that all Israeli educational institutions in the West Bank are under IDF responsibility.

Maariv (Jacky Hoogie) present five different scenarios ("The Black Hole") after a possible US withdrawal from Iraq. The Jerusalem Post interviewed Israeli and American public figures -- "critics and fans" of President Bush -- who said that the reason for delivering his speech on the Middle East this week is "Iraq," in a word.

Ha'aretz reported that settlers who were evacuated from Gush Katif in 2005 are building a monument to the settlements destroyed during disengagement.

Yediot reported that that the heads of the Moroccan Jewish community are promoting the idea of Yad Vashem granting the late Moroccan king Mohamed V (the grandfather of reigning King Mohamed VI) the title of Righteous Among the Nations, in recognition of his saving Moroccan Jews during the Holocaust. The newspaper said that this initiative, which was welcomed by President Peres, will have far-reaching diplomatic repercussions on Israel-Morocco ties. Yediot quoted sources in Yad Vashem are saying that the institution is not influenced by diplomatic or political considerations, but only by

historical and legal ones.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The President, who refuses to specify a time for the conclusion of the mission in Iraq, also declines to set a deadline in the secondary, Palestinian, arena."

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "In the waning days of the Bush administration, and perhaps of the Olmert government, the American and Israeli publics need to find ways to make it clear that they demand good leaders, not good politicians."

Liat Collins, Editor of The International Jerusalem Post, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Bush and Peres actually shared several themes, both calling for the development of the Negev and Galilee instead of the settlements."

Block Quotes:

II. "One Solution to Two Problems"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn and Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/20): "The President made clear to the senior officials in his administration that he views Olmert as a partner and ally, and won't let anyone stir up trouble between them. In the disagreement between Olmert and Rice, when the Secretary of State proposed conducting negotiations over a 'shelf agreement' to end the conflict, as opposed to the Prime Minister's position -- Bush backed Olmert and not his close friend Condi. His speech this week was meant to reinforce her standing. Bush indicated that she would lead the process, but that she did not have a mandate to press Israel too hard. The demands Bush presented to Israel were mild, almost imperceptible, compared to the challenge he gave the Palestinians.... The President, who refuses to specify a time for the conclusion of the mission in Iraq, also declines to set a deadline in the secondary, Palestinian, arena. He prefers a process that lasts years, if necessary, to shortcuts. The example of his predecessor is ever-present in his mind.... Bush has no intention of ending up like Bill Clinton, who discovered to his great misfortune at Camp David that the parties were not yet ready for an accord, and that the Palestinians still had no leadership or institutions with which to hold a serious dialogue or whose word could be counted on. To Bush's mind, Clinton's Camp David is not a model; it's a warning sign."

II. "Bush, the Talented Politician"

Deputy Managing Editor and right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (7/20): "Bush told the Palestinians that this is a 'moment of choice' for them. It is time for them to decide if they are for terror or peace. But then, he said the same thing five years ago. Since then, at every decision point, the Palestinians chose terror.... Israel's assigned role in this diplomatic farce is the patsy. Due to the exigencies of democratic politics, and in the absence of leadership on either side, over the past few years, US-Israel relations have taken on a sado-masochistic quality. To endear himself with the State Department and Europe, Bush has chosen to insist that Israel endanger itself. To survive in office, Olmert, like Ariel Sharon before him, has agreed to endanger Israel in order to secure the support of the Left in his governing coalition, and the State Prosecutor's Office. The one conclusion that cries out from all of this is that in the waning days of the Bush administration, and perhaps of the Olmert government, the American and Israeli publics need to find ways to make it clear that they demand good leaders, not good politicians."

III. "Two Presidents, One Vision"

Liat Collins, Editor of The International Jerusalem Post, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (7/20): "To describe the Bush address as groundbreaking would be as unreasonable as portraying Shimon Peres's presidential inauguration speech as sensational. Both have a vision. Both want to see peace in the Middle East. Both would like that peace to be attributed to them in the history books, rather than a failed war in Iraq in the case of the former and a failed peace created in Oslo in the case of the latter. I dutifully listened to Bush's plan for an international

parley in September (for this you interrupted my summer viewing pleasure?), the call to stop settlement expansion, and the plea to the Palestinians to choose between moderates (Mahmoud Abbas) and extremists (Hamas). Peres at the beginning of the week had made similar comments proving at the outset of his term in office that he could be the 'president of all' by angering settlers one day and the Left the next.... Bush and Peres actually shared several themes, both calling for the development of the Negev and Galilee instead of the settlements."

I2. Iran:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Most senior officials in the [Israeli] defense establishment believe that the United States will not strike Iran during George Bush's term -- everybody, that is, except Olmert."

Block Quotes:

"A Lame Duck Can Also Hit"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/20): "Economic sanctions bother [Iran] much more than the West can imagine.... The only question that remains open is who will win the race between the ignominy of economic sanctions imposed by the world and the crazy Iranian effort to obtain a bomb. Everyone talks of an American strike, but no one knows what will really happen. Most senior officials in the [Israeli] defense establishment believe that the United States will not strike Iran during George Bush's term -- everybody, except Olmert."

13. Iraq:

Summary:

Former Soviet dissident and former Likud Knesset Member and minister Natan Sharansky wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "A precipitous withdrawal of US forces could lead to a bloodbath that would make the current carnage pale by comparison."

Block Quotes:

"Bracing For a Bigger Bloodbath"

Former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky and former Likud Knesset Member and minister wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/20): "As the hideous violence in Iraq continues, it has become increasingly common to hear people argue that the world was better off with Saddam Hussein in power and that Iraqis were better off under his fist.... The truth is that in totalitarian regimes, there are no human rights. Period. For most people, life under totalitarianism is slavery, with no possibility of escape. That is why, despite the carnage in Iraq, Iraqis are consistently less pessimistic about the present and more optimistic about the future of their country than Americans are.... No one can know for sure whether President Bush's 'surge' of US troops in Iraq will succeed. But those who believe that human rights should play a central role in international affairs should be doing everything in their power to maximize its chances. For one of the consequences of failure could well be catastrophe. A precipitous withdrawal of US forces could lead to a bloodbath that would make the current carnage pale by comparison.... Many who supported the withdrawal [from Vietnam] in the name of human rights did not foresee the calamity that followed, which included genocide in Cambodia, tens of thousands slaughtered in Vietnam by the North Vietnamese, and the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of 'boat people.' My hope is that as US leaders decide their course, they will make the human rights dimension a central part of any decision. The consequences of not doing so might prove catastrophic to Iraqis, to regional peace and, ultimately, to US security."

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